

SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY - POST LOCKDOWN PARKING SCHEME

Cabinet - 16 November 2020

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - Finance & Trading

Status: For Decision

Also considered by:

- Council - 17 November 2020

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary:

Covid-19 and the new national restrictions introduced by Government from 5 November, which require the full or partial closure of a number of businesses, continues to have a significant impact on the local economy. Whilst responding to the pandemic has also had a significant impact on the Council's finances, it is essential that all options to support businesses and encourage economic recovery are considered, particularly at this crucial time of year for many traders.

This report sets out a further investment in the District during this pandemic through a reduction in parking charges post lockdown that encourages residents and visitors to return to our local stores in a safe manner.

Subject to the timing of the end of the new national restrictions it is hoped that this will coincide with the Christmas trading period, where the District Council will also deliver a communications campaign in support of the local economy and include Ambassadors to support businesses and their customers with Covid compliance.

This report supports the Economy theme of the Council Plan.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Margot McArthur

Contact Officer: Adrian Rowbotham, Ext. 7153

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- (a) The post lockdown parking scheme be approved and operate for one calendar month directly after the end of the current national restrictions.
- (b) Subject to recommendation (a) above, it is recommended to Council that the cost in terms of loss of income from the post lockdown parking scheme be met from a Supplementary Estimate (up to a maximum of £60,000).

Recommendation to Council:

The cost in terms of loss of income from the post lockdown parking scheme is met from a Supplementary Estimate (up to a maximum of £60,000).

Reason for recommendation: To ensure the local economy is supported in its recovery following the national restrictions implemented by Government in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The ongoing pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the District Council, its residents and local businesses. Following the announcement of new national restrictions which have required businesses to fully or partially close, this report sets out a proposal to reduce parking charges, in a time limited, Covid-secure and financially responsible way to support the local economy over the post lockdown period.
- 2 It is likely that the post lockdown period will be over the important Christmas trading period. The introduction of a parking scheme has the potential to enable residents and visitors to return to local shops with a lower cost of parking and support businesses by encouraging residents to return to in-store shopping and the cafes, restaurants and bars that have been significantly impacted by Covid restrictions this year.
- 3 The proposal set out in this report allows for the proper and safe management of our car parks and will let visitors choose a time and day that best works for them and their needs. It is also aimed to coincide with a High Streets communications campaign and the employment of Town Centre Ambassadors. These further investments are also aimed at supporting the local economy, whilst promoting a safe shopping environment.
- 4 It should also be noted, that subject to the approval of a supplementary estimate by Council at their meeting on 17 November, free parking will be offered in all Council car parks on the weekends of 12 & 13 December, and 19 & 20 December. The Christmas Parking report, as reported to Cabinet, can be seen at

Post Lockdown Parking Scheme

- 5 Through the Leader of the Council, Officers have been asked to set out a proposal to support local businesses through the post lockdown period. With the new national restrictions due to end on 3 December, this should coincide with the Christmas trading period.
- 6 Understanding the financial impact that responding to Covid-19 has had on the Council, with the current forecast of an overspend of £1m this year, it is recognised that the scheme must be financially responsible, whilst ensuring the Council is able to continue to support its local economy, a promise it sets out in its Council Plan.
- 7 It is therefore proposed that the post lockdown parking scheme seeks to provide one hour of free parking for short stay visitors within the Council's car parks for one calendar month from the end of lockdown. The additional one hour of parking, free of charge, will be available to all short stay pay and display customers. These are customers that pay on the MiPermit phone app, or by cash at the pay and display machines.
- 8 The car parks included in the scheme are:
 - Bradbourne, Sevenoaks (1-5 hours weekdays and 1-4 hours weekends tickets only)
 - Buckhurst 1, Sevenoaks
 - Sevenoaks Town, Sevenoaks (Saturdays only)
 - St. Johns and St. James, Sevenoaks
 - Stag Theatre (South Park), Sevenoaks
 - Suffolk Way, Sevenoaks
 - Bevan Place, Swanley
 - Park Road, Swanley
 - Station Road, Swanley
 - Quebec, Westerham
 - Vicarage Hill, Westerham
- 9 Excluded from the scheme is the Bligh's car park in Sevenoaks Town. Demand for this car park remains exceptionally high and it is important that a regular turnover of spaces is encouraged at Bligh's. To this end it is not considered desirable to encourage a further hour of free parking.
- 10 For clarity, the post lockdown parking scheme is in addition to the free Christmas Parking days set out at paragraph 4 of this report.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

Cabinet could choose not to implement the proposals set out in this report. If the proposal set out is rejected, the expected positive effect of the proposal on the local economy over the post lockdown period would not be achieved.

Should the proposal set out be rejected, Members are able to request that Officers investigate alternative schemes. Should this be the case, general direction on Cabinet's preferred approach would be welcomed.

Key Implications

Financial

An exact projection of the cost of the scheme being proposed is difficult to achieve, as this will be driven by the take-up of the scheme.

Based on car park usage in December 2019 and the costs incurred in changing pricing, the estimated cost of the scheme is up to £60,000.

To meet the costs of this scheme, it is proposed by the Council's s.151 Officer (Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Finance & Trading) that a supplementary estimate to a maximum of £60,000 is recommended to Council for approval.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

Notification of the changes to the car park charges will be required.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Community Impact and Outcomes

The post lockdown parking scheme is designed to have a positive impact on the local economy following the new Covid restrictions introduced by Government from 5 November.

The scheme is aimed at supporting local businesses in their immediate recovery during the Christmas period and offering one hour of free parking in short stay car parks, across the whole week, is designed to stimulate additional trade.

This proposal is expected to be popular with residents, visitors to the district, businesses and traders, and supportive of local economic vibrancy.

Conclusions

To support the local economic recovery post lockdown, Members are recommended to approve a Parking Scheme which offers one hour of free short-stay parking in the car parks identified in paragraph 8 of this report.

The proposed scheme would be implemented for one calendar month from the end of the current lockdown (3 December or later if extended by Parliament) and the estimated costs of up to £60,000 are met from a supplementary estimate.

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

Christmas Parking report -

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s42564/13%20Christmas%20Parking.pdf?J=6>

Adrian Rowbotham

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Finance & Trading